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# The Special Difficulties of Christian Work Among the Mormons and How They May be Overcome

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Even friends who are unusually well posted about Mormonism sometimes ask, "Why is it that we cannot reach the Mormon people more largely with our church and school work?" The following facts among many may help to answer this exceedingly important question, as well as to convey some idea of what Mormonism really is.

First it should be remembered that Christian work among the Mormons has to meet all the difficulties which are found elsewhere. The world, the flesh and the devil in their usual forms are quite as much in evidence there as anywhere else, and quite as hard to meet. But besides these there is a whole set of difficulties peculiar to this particular field, which we must study and overcome before we can ever "solve the Mormon problem." Some of these are as follows:

1. THE NATURAL PREJUDICE of one system against another, intense according to the real or fancied antagonism between either the systems or their adherents, or both. This may be understood somewhat by the prejudice between Catholics and Protestants; though Mormonism is vastly farther from Christianity than Romanism is, and its antagonism will eventually be greater, if it is not so already.

2. THE NUMBERS, WEALTH AND ORGANIZATION OF MORMONISM compared with Christianity in the same regions. In Utah there are about 5,300 members in all the Christian churches together, while the Mormons number about 220,000 in that State; we are not organ-

ized so as to work at all closely together, and have small financial ability, while they have practically unlimited resources of both tithing and power over their adherents.

3. THE MORMON "PRIESTHOOD." Mormonism is probably the most complete ecclesiastical system ever set in operation, not excepting Jesuitry. Because the priesthood claims to be "a part of God," and is believed to be such by all good Mormons, it is able to make effective an antagonism to the Christian church and faith which is equal to its own departure therefrom; and this is almost complete. It has one or more resident representatives on every block of a city or village, whose duty it is to visit every family at frequent intervals and if possible to keep them under its control in every department of life; for, as it claims, its "jurisdiction extends over all things spiritual or temporal." It is easy to see how such a power, with such an inquisitorial knowledge of the affairs of its people, can of itself almost entirely prevent them from even attending our services. Its usual manner of doing this seems to be not so much by direct prohibition, which might provoke rebellion, as by a seeming liberality which is more than neutralized by certain teachings which we must now consider.

4. SYSTEMATIC, PRIESTLY SLANDERS AGAINST THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AND HER MINISTRY. Every Mormon is intensely indoctrinated with the following ideas:

(a) That the Christian churches are not really churches at all, but base impositions designed by men for selfish gain; the true church and gospel having been taken back to heaven shortly after the death of the Apostle John, and only restored to the earth through Jos. Smith about 1830. (Some such teaching at this was necessary to make room for the Smith "church" which he wished to found.)

(b) That the Christian ministry is "a spurious priesthood, destitute of divine authority, divine inspiration and divine power \* \* \* set up by ambitious and designing men \* \* \* base counterfeit of the

true and heavenly coin"—[which is the Mormon "elder!"].—*Mormon Doctrine*, p. 21.

(c) That the Christian work done among them by this spurious ministry is for two selfish ends: (1) To build up a sect which shall bye-and-bye overthrow theirs—a motive both selfish and antagonistic, which they will of course not willingly aid. (2) To get "the money there is in it" for the worker (his salary)—another selfish motive. If the pastor claims to be working from spiritual motives, as of course every true pastor is, that makes him a lying hypocrite and so much the worse.

Such teachings are unceasingly dinned into the ears of the people through their "church" paper, their services, in their text-books and in conversation. The following extracts from remarks of "elders" in a service in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, from the Mormon paper of Dec. 18, 1902, will illustrate this point: A Colorado woman having asked the "elder" to give a local pastor some instructions in doing his church work (!) he reports the conversation further as follows:

"I remarked to her that I would willingly do so, but that I was afraid he could not live up to it or teach it to his congregation. 'Why?' she asked. My answer was, 'He requires a salary to preach the gospel. Whenever he arises to preach to his congregation and says that which they do not like, they say that he will have to stop preaching that way or they will stop his salary. Now,' said I, 'when I preach to the people I do not care whose toes I tread on; I do not care who I strike; I teach the truth, and no matter where it hits, they cannot come to me and say, 'We'll stop your salary,' because I haven't any to stop. That's the difference between your minister and me. . . . I would rather be a humble elder preaching the gospel unto the people, bearing the testimony that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph Smith is a prophet of God, than to be the greatest 'divine' upon the face of the earth:'"

The next speaker in the same meeting said:

. . . "I have a sort of indignant strain in my own blood when I hear these falsehoods spoken against us by men professing to be ministers of Jesus Christ. An appeal was made to the Gentiles who live in our midst, but I do not expect to see any number of them, however long they have lived in our midst, ever stand up and be men enough to deny to the world the lies that are told about us. I do expect, though, that if they go away from Salt Lake City for a period they will enter into the spirit of their brothers and lie with them. That is the only thing I expect from them, especially from those who wear the long coats and are professed ministers of the gospel. We might name many of them to you, but you know them as well as I do. The Latter-

day Saints, from the beginning until now, have suffered from the misrepresentation of this class of men, and I expect that we will suffer until Christ comes to reign, from just such men."

Hundreds of similar statements might be quoted from the same publication during even these later years. Was there ever a more Satanic plan to rob the true gospel message of its power by blackening the characters and motives of its messengers? If so, the writer does not recall it. At any rate it is perfectly clear that we need not expect many Mormons to attend our churches as long as their minds are filled with such devilish falsehoods as these. And when one does attend, the gospel message will usually be able to reach his mind only after it has been blackened and scorched and distorted by passing through several mental strata of these slanders, which were intended to prevent him from attending at all and with which his whole being is permeated. It is simply idle to expect to reach these needy souls within any reasonable time by an agency, unaided, against which they have such an intense and in-trained prejudice.

5. THE SECLUSION OF THE PEOPLE. Largely as a result of the causes already noted, the Mormon people are almost entirely secluded from direct Christian influences. About two-thirds of their present number were born into their faith and have grown up in an almost exclusively Mormon atmosphere, while the most of the others have been so long under such influences that earlier teachings have become nearly obliterated. In Utah and Southern Idaho alone there are 145,000 people, mostly Mormons, who have no sort of Christian services in the places where they live; while the almost equal number who live where they might attend will not do so, from reasons already noted. And, besides this, the peculiarities of Mormon belief and practice are such as very generally to render them clannish, and so the more to separate them from better influences.

6. MORMON CHANGES IN THE MEANINGS OF CHRISTIAN WORDS. Mormonism changes the meaning of almost all the fundamental Christian words and of some

others, so that they carry very untrue ideas to its people. The very Word of God is thus robbed of its message and made to speak a false one, and the Christian sermon may become almost a Mormon message before it reaches the thought of its Mormon hearer. To them the word "God" carries the idea of one of many polygamous, flesh-and- bones beings who were once men; "Christ," that of a son of such a god (Adam) and Mary; "faith," either a mere head-belief or a semi-miraculous power; "sin," only an inexpediency; "repentance," regret at such inexpediency; "baptism," immersion by a Mormon "elder" to wash away such a sin; "salvation," bodily resurrection; "atonement," making such resurrection possible; and so on. The awful results of such perversion of terms can only be imagined by one who has had long experience with it.

7. THE DIFFICULTY OF MEETING MORMON ERROR FROM THE PULPIT. The fundamental need of the Mormon is not exhortation to do what he already knows. He is not ready for much of that; his ideas are so terribly distorted that it means little to him. His crucial need is to have the awful fallacies of his peculiar beliefs laid before him plainly and kindly, with the corresponding truths of Christianity in contrast. This is a work which requires special gifts, training and experience, which not every pastor can command. And thus far it has been considered very seldom possible for a church to take up such work without incurring a net result of increased hostility against itself, such as has already been outlined.

8. THE VERY SINCERITY OF THE MORMON COMMON PEOPLE IN THEIR BELIEF. After visiting in about twelve hundred Mormon homes and talking with them about their beliefs, the writer is convinced beyond a doubt that the common Mormon (he does not speak of the leaders) is very generally sincere in his belief of even the most repulsive features of his system. Most likely having been born into Mormonism, and at any rate having been trained into it by an assiduity which shames most

modern teaching of Christianity, why should he not be so—rather how can he help being so? And every atom of this sincerity is an atom of opposition to anything which discredits either the honesty or the contents of his belief. We have hardly given the Mormon people credit enough hitherto at this point, but the fact is fundamental to any proper understanding of the case.

9. THE DOCTRINE OF "TESTIMONY" AND CONTINUOUS REVELATION. It is hard to deal with a system having a "private wire" to heaven which any one may tap under easy conditions. Such supposed communication renders the people altogether too independent of commonplace matters like the Bible and all the every-day facts and logic and common-sense and history and experience which govern ordinary people—and which govern them in other matters. Many a time have Mormons said to the writer that it made no difference what he said or brought to their notice against Mormon errors, "they had a testimony from God that Mormonism was true and Joseph Smith a prophet sent from God, and nothing whatever could shake it." Every Mormon is taught from childhood that by a proper course he can and should obtain this special revelation from God; and such is very often his aim. By a psychologic and perhaps partially hypnotic process of excluding contrary facts (if he knows of such), concentrating attention upon falsehoods taught as facts, and subjecting himself to the influence of strong Mormon characters, multitudes of this people reach a genuine conviction of the truth of one of the most damnable frauds ever perpetrated upon suffering humanity; and this constitutes one of the most stubborn difficulties with which we have to deal. It is perhaps at once the climax of priestcraft everywhere and of Satanic delusion. It is the inner fortification of this great system of error. It supplants the Bible by later and more pertinent messages; it makes the Mormon think and say "We have all that you have and much more; why should we come to you for any truth?" in a spirit of conceit and exclusiveness re-

minding one of the Chinese. And the "private wire," instead of running to heaven as it is believed to do, is the means by which the arch Enemy himself lures these blinded souls to their own destruction.

We have thus hastily sketched the greater special difficulties which confront any who would rescue the 310,000 Mormons from their crushing delusion and our nation from the menace of this evil. The Church of Christ often finds it hard to make headway against the difficulties of other fields. Can it make the needful progress against the same obstacles here *with all these new ones added*? If so, it will certainly be one of the greatest proofs of the power of Christianity ever enacted in any age. That it will finally do so, the writer has no doubt. That it will do so with only the localized methods of the past, which were framed for fields having none of these special difficulties, and to overcome which every wile of Satan in these new obstacles has been particularly designed, he has practically *no hope*, for at least a generation or two. The figures show that in the twelve years from 1890 to 1902 Mormonism has doubled its numbers and more than doubled its power, in spite of all we have done; and we can hardly expect greater effectiveness of these methods in future. They have accomplished much, and must be continued to the full. But if we leave them unaided for another twelve years we shall certainly awake to an educated Mormonism instead of an ignorant one, very probably doubled again in numbers and power, holding absolute political control of the whole region from Canada to Mexico and a strong balance of power in Congress, while the grip of this deadly false religion as a religion upon the souls it now blinds is stronger than ever before; and meanwhile at least 100,000 Mormons will have passed on to eternity without the gospel light which we are commanded to send to them! God has never made a people which could not be reached with His Truth in some way. Reaching even this people is entirely possible. If we fail to do it, in this age of unlimited resources, it seems to the writer that we might as well cease calling ourselves Christians and go on unhindered to the final end of the unfaithful. From mere motives of self-preservation it were the most foolish policy in the world to leave the Utah work without reinforcements at such a critical time as this.

From all the facts thus far brought out, it is evident that the work which shall meet the present need of the



Mormon people must be a highly specialized one, fitted for the peculiar situation which confronts it. It cannot be merely a localized effort, because the people will not come to such; nor a denominational or salaried one, for against these they are intensely and continuously prejudiced. It must be more than a match for the priesthood, error, "testimony" and Satan together, or it will fall before these enemies. It must be able to reach the whole people with the gospel leaven rapidly. It must come to them with evident self-denial, on the basis of a common humanity, gladly acknowledging their sincerity and whatever else is good among them as a basis of appeal for all that is better and best.

Such an effort is that of the Utah Gospel Mission, which is incorporated at Cleveland, Ohio. Providentially brought into being, it is believed, out of the highest experience in Utah, its methods thus far have met with unexpected success in coping with the problems presented. Its workers are both unsectarian and unsalaried, living in and working from special gospel wagons the year round, and doing a peculiar and evidently self-denying work along both colporter and evangelistic lines. Devices conceived against "sectarian," localized, salaried and ministerial work fall powerless before methods which present none of these features. Prejudice is disarmed and even the "priesthood" largely shorn of its power by methods which outwardly resemble its own enough to logically compel a kindly reception of both our men and message. (See I. Cor. 9:15-23.) The people cannot remain away from a work which goes to them, as the early Apostles used to go to the people before there was either church or salary. Even the Mormon "testimony" will fall before facts repeatedly and clearly and kindly brought to bear in self-sacrificing love. The one power stronger than priestly error is that of truth with God behind it; and if this truth be only brought into kindly and wise touch with the needy souls the effect will be simply irresistible. Here is the solution of the Mormon problem, and the salvation of the Mormon people; and the key to it all, under God, is in these methods which can and do reach the whole people with that truth which the Spirit can use mightily.

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